

Autobiography Written for
Charles Lannan, 1858

DRAWER

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BIOGRAPHY

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Biographies and Stories of Abraham Lincoln

Autobiography Written for
Charles Lanman, 1858

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

The Life of Lincoln, Written by

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD.

Georgetown, D. C., April 27, 1865

As everything connected with the history of our martyr President is of intense interest I send you a brief record which illustrates his singular modesty as a man. When, in 1858, I commenced my labors on the work known as the "Dictionary of Congress," I forwarded to every ex-member of Congress whose residence I could ascertain a circular asking each person for information as to the date and place of his birth, the character of his education, his profession or occupation, and a list of any public positions he may have filled. Those simple facts were all I wanted, and in looking over the thousands of replies that have been sent me, since, it is truly remarkable to find that men of the greatest ability have invariably told a direct and brief story, thereby preserving their innate modesty and writing nothing to compromise their dignity. The reply which I received from Mr. Lincoln was singularly brief, and yet comprehensive, and you may well imagine is now highly valued by me, with other friendly letters by the same hand, as a memento of one who possessed all the "degrees of sovereign honor," as elucidated by Lord Bacon; and who, like Regulus and the two Deells, sacrificed his life for the good of his country. The record in question is as follows:—

Born February 12, 1809, in Hardin county, Kentucky.

Education defective.

Profession, a lawyer.

Have been a captain of 600 men in the Black Hawk war.

Postmaster at a very small village.

Four times a member of the State Legislature.

And was a member of the House of Congress.

A. LINCOLN.

Such is the story of his life down to 1863. What a wonderful contrast does it present to his subsequent career!

Yours, very respectfully,

CHARLES LANMAN.

MISS ANNA B. SANKEY
649 Poplar St., City

ART-DRAMA
LITERATURE
and
CURRENT AFFAIRS

Woman's Department Club Bulletin

IC-FRENCH
NATURE STUDY
SOCIAL SCIENCE

Volume 4

TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA, FEBRUARY 13, 1928

Number 18

A SHORT SKETCH OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

In 1848, Lincoln wrote his biography and it was the only history of himself, written by himself, which he then expected to be printed.

"Born Feb. 12, 1809 in Hardin County, Kentucky, Education defective. Profession, Lawyer. Have been a captain of a volunteer company in Black Hawk War. Also postmaster at a small office. Four times member of Illinois Legislature, and was a member of the Lower House of Congress."

Yours, etc.,

A. Lincoln.

At the age of seven Lincoln's father brought him to Indiana, the same year that Indiana became a state, whose entire population numbered 65,000.

He lost his mother when he was he was ten years old. Her grave is on the hill-side looking down upon the little town of Lincoln City, and was marked by a simple slab until Mr. James Studebaker of South Bend erected a shaft to her memory, inscribed "Mother of Abraham Lincoln" Lincoln once wrote in a letter, "All I am and all I hope to be, I owe to my dear mother."

He said, "I never went to school

more than six months in my life." In the log cabin before the fireplace he read his library through and through. It consisted of the Bible, Life of Washington, Aesop's Fables and Pilgrim's Progress. On a wooden shovel with a bit of charcoal he figured to the "rule of three." The Southwestern Indiana Historical Society is spending much time in research work concerning the fourteen formative years of Lincoln's life spent in Indiana, of which his biographers say almost nothing.

In 1830, when twenty-one, he moved with his father to Illinois. Before leaving the last home of his mother, he put on a wooden slab the initials, N. H. L. and placed it securely at the head of the grave.

In 1931 on his second trip to New Orleans he witnessed for the first time the whipping of slaves the separation of families and the sale of slaves on the auction block. It was then he said "If ever I get a chance to hit that institution, I'll hit it hard."

He went into the Black Hawk War and was elected captain.

At twenty-one he was a candidate for the Legislature and defeated. His

first speech in that campaign is as follows:

Gentlemen, fellow citizens: I presume you all know who I am. Humble Abraham Lincoln. I have been solicited by my friends to become a candidate for the legislature. My politics are short and sweet like the old woman's dance. I am in favor of the Internal Improvement system, and of a high protective tariff. If elected, I shall be thankful; if not it will be all the same to me."

Lincoln at the age of 24, was elected. Four years later, he was re-elected and then he began his anti-slavery work which twenty-six years afterward ended in the Proclamation of Emancipation.

At the age of thirty-two, he bought a second-hand copy of Blackstone and began to study law. His old friend and fellow soldier John T. Stewart, who was a prosperous lawyer in Springfield lent him books. Lincoln then lived at New Salem, fourteen miles away. When he moved to Springfield, he rode into town on a borrowed horse, without any earthly goods, except a pair of saddlebags, two or three law books and some clothes. Then he began his life as a lawyer in Springfield.

In 1846 he ran for Congress against the celebrated circuit rider Peter Cartwright. The following is a story of an event in the campaign:

Lincoln attended the preaching of Cartwright one evening after having spoken in debate with him in the afternoon. After his sermon Preacher Cartwright called upon all who wanted to go to heaven to stand. All arose but Lincoln. Then the preacher asked that all who didn't want to go to hell should stand. Still Lincoln did not arise. Then Cartwright exclaimed, "I'm surprised to see Abe Lincoln sitting back there and if he does not want to go to heaven, nor escape hell, will he tell us where he does want to go. Thereupon Lincoln arose and replied, "I am going to Congress."

It was in that Congress that Lincoln and Col. Thompson first met. Their friendship lasted until the death of Lincoln. In 1849 their terms expired, and they returned to their respective homes in Springfield and Terre Haute.

In 1854 the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused Lincoln and he returned to politics. He had not yet become an abolitionist, he believed slavery was wrong, but that it was entitled to its constitutional rights. He was strongly opposed to any further extension of it into new states and territories, so he made up his mind that he would be the next Senator from Illinois.

Senator Stephen A. Douglas who was the author of the bill to repeal the Missouri Compromise was the most

(Continued on page five)

powerful man in Congress. At thirty, he had been a member of the Illinois Legislature, state's attorney, registrar of land office, secretary of the state of Illinois, judge of the supreme court and had been elected to Congress. Three times he was re-elected to the lower house and in 1852 he was elected to the Senate. He was indeed a great and dangerous adversary; but when Douglas and Lincoln met in debate, the people realized that the gift of oratory, that depth of judgment and soundness and breadth of statesmanship did not rest with the great Douglas alone. Lincoln was a giant intellectually and physically and he was also a great political organizer and leader, and if the decision as to the senatorship had been made by popular vote, Lincoln would have won.

In order to reach both Democrats and Republicans, Lincoln challenged Douglas to debate and the seven debates between them in 1858 are the most famous in our history. Lincoln's proposition was this: "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect that the Union will be dissolved. I do not expect that it will be divided. It will become one thing or the other." When Douglas and Lincoln met in the political arena, interest was not confined to Illinois, where the meetings were held but spread all over the North, South, East and West, and the Presidency of the United States proved to be the final goal.

In 1860 Douglas was nominated for the presidency by the Democratic party and Lincoln by the Republican party. In November Lincoln was elected.

In 1861 came the Civil War and to trace adequately the life of Lincoln would be to give the history of that great conflict. On September 22, 1862 he issued the Emancipation Proclamation. In March 1865 he entered upon his second term as President and on the 9th of April, Lee surrendered to Grant. April 11th Lincoln made his last public address, in which he outlined, broad and generous policies, for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the conquered South, but on April 15, 1865 the bullet of an assassin put an end to this noble and heroic life. The Country's loss has never been told.

Lincoln believed in the Bible, but not in creeds and dogmas. He once said, "When a church shall inscribe on its altar as its sole qualification for membership, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,' that church shall I join with all my soul"

Bulletin of the
LINCOLN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
FOUNDATION

Louis A. Warren - - Editor

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It does not seem to be known, generally, outside the circle of students who have become interested in the life of Abraham Lincoln, that at the request of different parties he prepared some sketches about himself. These autobiographical notes have been the source of our most valuable information about his family history, early life, and public service. When first approached about writing some notes for a newspaper editor he replied that it would be folly to attempt to make anything out of his early life as it could be condensed into a single line found in Gray's *Elegy*: "The short and simple annals of the poor." However he set about preparing for this editor, Mr. Scripps, his most complete autobiographical sketch, too long to print in these columns.

Dictionary of Congress—1858

Possibly the most condensed data which he presented, was sent to the editor of the Dictionary of Congress for 1858, upon the usual request for a sketch of his life. It follows in six brief sentences.

"Born, February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky.

"Education defective.

"Profession a lawyer.

"Have been a captain of volunteers
in Black Hawk War.

"Postmaster at a very small office.
"Four times a member of the Illinois Legislature, and was a member of the lower house of Congress."

Yours, etc.

A. Lincoln.

Dictionary of Congress—1864

If Abraham Lincoln prepared another sketch for a revised issue of the same publication in 1864, the editor must have taken some liberties with it, or confused a portion of it at least with some other biographical notice. Aside from the reference to his schooling in Stafford County, Virginia, his subsequent occupation as a school teacher and his law training in Culpepper County, Virginia, the item seems to be fairly accurate.

Abraham Lincoln—He was born in Hardin County, Kentucky, February 12, 1809; removed with his father to Indiana in 1816; received a limited ed-

ucation; spent two years at school in Stafford County, Virginia; taught school and studied law for a time in Culpepper County, of that State; removed to Illinois in 1830, and turned his attention to agricultural pursuits; he served as a Captain of volunteers in the Black Hawk war; was at one time Postmaster in a small village; and he served four years in the Illinois Legislature, during which time he turned his attention again to the study of law, and settled at Springfield in the practice of his profession. He was a member of the National Convention which nominated General Taylor for President in 1848, and was a Representative in Congress, from Illinois, from 1847 to 1849, serving on the Committees on the Postoffice and Post-roads, and on Expenses in the War Department. In 1858 he acquired distinction by stumping the State of Illinois, for the United States Senate, against S. A. Douglas; and in 1860 he was nominated by the Republican Party as their candidate for President of the United States, and was duly elected to that position for the term commencing the 4th of March, 1861. By the Baltimore Convention, held in 1864, he was nominated for re-election to the Presidency.

Autobiography Written for Fell

The autobiographical efforts to which authors most often refer was prepared by Mr. Lincoln for Jesse W. Fell and sent to him December 20, 1859, with the following letter:

J. W. Fell, Esq.

My dear Sir: Herewith is a little sketch, as you requested. There is not much of it, for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me. If anything be made out of it, I wish it to be modest, and not to go beyond the material. If it were thought necessary to incorporate anything from any of my speeches, I suppose there would be no objection. Of course it must not appear to have been written by myself.

Yours very truly,

A. Lincoln.

I was born February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families—second families, perhaps I should say. My mother, who died in my tenth year, was of a family of the name of Hanks, some of whom now reside in Adams, and others in Macon County, Illinois. My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County, Virginia, to Kentucky about 1781 or 1782, where a year or two later he was killed by the Indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest. His ancestors, who were Quakers, went to Virginia from Berks County, Pennsylvania. An effort to identify them with the New

England family of the same name ended in nothing more definite than a similarity of Christian names in both families, such as Enoch, Levi, Mordecai, Solomon, Abraham, and the like.

My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age, and he grew up literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "readin', writin', and cipherin'" to the rule of three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course, when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write and cipher to the rule of three, but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

I was raised to farm work, which I continued till I was twenty-two. At twenty-one I came to Illinois, Macon County. Then I got to New Salem, at that time in Sangamon, now in Menard County, where I remained a year as a sort of clerk in a store. Then came the Black Hawk war; and I was elected a captain of volunteers, a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since. I went the campaign, was elated, ran for the legislature the same year (1832), and was beaten—the only time I have ever been beaten by the people. The next and three succeeding biennial elections I was elected to the legislature. I was not a candidate afterward. During this legislative period I had studied law, and removed to Springfield to practice it. In 1846 I was once elected to the lower House of Congress. Was not a candidate for re-election. From 1849 to 1854, both inclusive, practiced law more assiduously than ever before. Always a Whig in politics; and generally on the Whig electoral tickets, making active canvasses. I was losing interest in politics when the repeal of the Missouri compromise aroused me again. What I have done since that is pretty well known.

If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said I am, in height, six feet four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing on an average one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair and gray eyes. No other marks or brands recollected.

Yours truly,

A. Lincoln.



Lincoln's 47-Word Autobiography Did Not Daunt Historians

Although Abraham Lincoln first told the story of his life in 47 words, biographers have written more than 6,500 complete books and booklets about him since his assassination in Ford's theater 76 years ago today. Authority for this statement is Dr. L. A. Warren, director of the Lincoln National Life Insurance company's Lincoln museum. "More has been written about Lincoln than about any other character who ever lived—Biblical characters excepted," Dr. Warren said.

Lincoln wrote his 47-word description of his own life in 1858 at the request of Charles Lanman, compiler of the Dictionary of Congress. The summary, which was Lincoln's first autobiographical sketch, follows:

"Born February 12, 1809, in Hardin county, Ky. Education defective. Profession, a lawyer. Have been a captain of volunteers in Black Hawk war. Postmaster at a very small office. Four times a member of the Illinois legislature, and was a member of the lower house of congress."

NAZI 'EASTER EGGS'

BERLIN, Apr. 13.—(AP)—DNB, official German news agency, said today the British airports of Lavenzia and Luca, on Malta, were given a shower of "easter eggs" by the Nazi luftwaffe in the early morning hours. Considerable damage was done to runways and parked planes, the agency said, also claiming one direct bomb hit on the stern of a British destroyer.

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N.Y. Times June 10, 1973
**Lincoln Autobiography
Sold at \$325 a Word**

PHILADELPHIA, June 9 (AP)—Abraham Lincoln's 49-word autobiography — written while he was still a member of the House of Representatives has been purchased for \$16,000 at an auction here by Maury A. Bromsen of Boston, a rare-books dealer.

In 1858, Lincoln received a letter asking for a biographical sketch. He mailed back the following information on the bottom of the letter:

"Born Feb. 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky— Education, defective — Profession, a lawyer—have been a Captain of Volunteers in the Black Hawk War; Post Master at a very small office, four times a member of the Illinois Legislature; and since a member of the Lower House of Congress.

"Yours Sincerely,
"A. Lincoln"

The request came from Charles Lanman, who was then compiling a "Biographical Dictionary of the American Congress."

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BRIEF AUTOBIOGRAPHY June(15?), 1858

The compiler of the "Dictionary of Congress" states that while preparing that work for publication, in 1858, he sent to Mr. Lincoln the usual request for a sketch of his life, and received the following reply :

Born, Feb.12, 1809, in Hardin County,
Kentucky.

Education defective.

Profession, a lawyer.

Have been a captain of volunteers in Black
Hawk war.

Postmaster at a very small office.

Four times a member of the Illinois legisla-
ture, and was a member of the lower house of
Congress.

Yours, etc.,

A.Lincoln.

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